



Lt. Col. Michael P. Anderson, USAF

"I'm having a great time. This is what I wanted to do since I was a little kid. I urge you all to remember that if you apply yourself, work hard to be persistent, and don't give up, you can achieve anything you want to achieve."

(From the last televised interview with Michael Anderson, KXLY-TV, channel 4, Spokane, Wash.)

Biography

(From the NASA STS-107 Crew Memorial)

"Michael Anderson always wanted to fly planes and rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Air Force," President George W. Bush said. "Along the way, he became a role model, especially for his two daughters and for the many children he spoke to in schools. He said to them, 'Whatever you want to be in life, you're training for it now.'"

He was born on Dec. 25, 1959, in Plattsburgh, N.Y., but he considered Spokane, Wash., to be his hometown. His dad was in the Air Force, and Anderson was exposed to aviation as a kid. He said that science caught his attention when he was young. These interests were two of the reasons why he wanted to be an astronaut.

"... at that time, we were going to the Moon and doing some really fantastic things with the space program," he said. "And, to me that was just the best combination of the two. You know, here you have these men that are scientists, engineers, and they're also flying these wonderful airplanes and these great spaceships, and they're going places. And to me, that just seemed like the perfect mix and the perfect job. So, very early on, I just thought being an astronaut would be a fantastic thing to do."

While at Cheney High School in Cheney, Wash., Anderson said he began to think about what college to go to and what to major in so that he could have a shot at becoming an astronaut. He decided to pick a science field that was broad.

"I picked physics because out of all the different scientific fields, I think physics is probably the broadest," he said. "It covers basically everything. It allows you to really take your interest and point it in any direction you'd like to point [it] in. So, I went to the University of Washington as a physics and astronomy major. And just had a marvelous time. I found it very challenging, very rewarding."

"My other interest, of course, was aviation. I always wanted to be a pilot. I wanted to fly airplanes. And, if you're going to fly airplanes, the best place to be is the Air Force. So, I went through the ROTC program there, and they provided me with a scholarship to help me pay for college."

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Anderson earned a bachelor's degree in physics/astronomy from Washington in 1981. Then, he received a commission from the U.S. Air Force as a second lieutenant.

During his stint in the Air Force, Anderson received a master's degree in physics in 1990 from Creighton University in Omaha, Neb. Anderson flew various models of the KC-135 and the T-38A aircraft, logging more than 3,000 hours of flight time. He also became an instructor pilot.

Anderson got a step closer to fulfilling his dream of becoming an astronaut in late 1994 when NASA selected him as an astronaut candidate.

"... you just sort of pursue your interests," he said, "and you pray about it, and hopefully one day all things will kind of fall into place. And you'll have a chance to make those dreams come true. And fortunately for me, it did happen that way."

In the same preflight interview, he went on to say that he hasn't been disappointed, "And it's been a marvelous adventure. I've enjoyed every bit of it."

Anderson's first space flight occurred in 1998 when he flew as a mission specialist on Space Shuttle Endeavour during STS-89. That flight was the eighth Shuttle/Mir mission. Anderson spent 8 days, 19 hours and 47 minutes in space.

In 2003, he made his second trip into space on Space Shuttle Columbia during STS-107. He served as the STS-107 payload commander. More than 80 experiments were conducted during the flight.

Astronaut Office Chief Kent Rominger said that Anderson was the right man for the job of STS-107 payload commander. "He was a perfect choice for the payload commander," he said. "Organized, thorough, someone you could absolutely count on, a gifted leader."

Anderson and his six crewmates perished on Feb. 1, 2003, as Columbia broke up over Texas during re-entry, about 16 minutes before landing. STS-107 spent 15 days, 22 hours and 20 minutes in space, giving him a total of 24 days, 18 hours and 7 minutes in space.

Anderson is survived by his wife and children.

Outside of NASA, Anderson loved his family and cars. Even though he was a quiet person, Rominger said there were things that Anderson loved to talk about and that he had a great sense of humor.

"He was the quiet type," Rominger said, "Unless you asked him about his family or his Porsche. And perhaps because he was quiet, we all loved to see him laugh. And when he laughed, we laughed with him even harder, and he knew just when to drop a great punch line."

Anderson was also known for his religious faith. Bush said this about Anderson, "He also told his minister, 'If this thing doesn't come out right, don't worry about me, I'm just going on higher.'"

